

Tribal Chair Kathryn Harrison and Forest Supervisor Darrel Kenops sign the MOU at the Governance Center.

Photo by Lindy Trolan

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Last summer, participants from

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Yesterday & Today: The long, rich history of Chemawa Indian

By Brent Merrill

Success comes in many packages. Chemawa Indian Boarding School in Keizer, Oregon is a place rich in history — it's also a place with its own share of success stories.

Chemawa Indian High School is a place where the past blends with the present. It's a place where young people dream about the future.

The school was founded in 1880 in Forest Grove and celebrates its 120th anniversary this month.

Chemawa is the oldest off-reservation Indian boarding school in the country. The U.S. Army and influential members of the Congregational Church played a major role in the school's beginnings. Originally, the school was known as the Indian Industrial Training and Normal School. Pacific University provided the school's first administration.

The first students came from the Puyallup Reservation in Washington. The children literally built their own school and living quarters after they arrived. Just over 300 students attended the school in the five years it was located in Forest Grove.

The U.S. Government moved the school to its present location in Keizer in the spring of 1885. Again, the

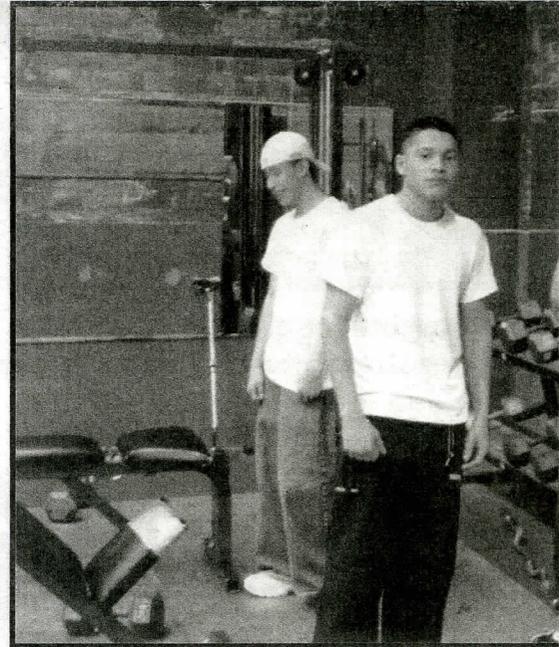
children built their own school buildings and dormitories at the new Chemawa location. The children also worked in the nearby hop fields to earn enough money to buy the acreage for the school grounds.

The original intent of the school was to make Indian children more accustomed to the ways of the dominant culture. Male children had their hair cropped and hand-made clothes were replaced with new pants and shirts with collars. Native languages were forbidden and memories of home were discouraged.

According to Rick Read of the Oregon Historical Society, most administrators thought they were doing what was best for the children.

"Most of the people associated with the school thought they were doing the right thing," said Read. "It was this whole idea of assimilation. The whole goal was to assimilate people into the dominant culture. No doubt about it. They wouldn't allow people to speak their language — that was the goal. It is important to note that attitudes were much different in the late 1800s. It was part of a national trend."

Today, Chemawa is a much dif-



Native Pride is prominent at Chemawa. Whiteplume and Lionel Bell in the school gymnasium.

ferent place. And although not all students are successful, many are.

Today, Chemawa is a fully accredited four-year high school that is overseen by the Chemawa Indian School Board of Directors.

Chemawa's athletic teams compete in the Tri-River Conference in baseball, softball, girl's volleyball, football, cross-country, track and field, basketball and wrestling. The school has a gymnasium, weight room and wrestling room, baseball diamonds, a track and a football stadium.

The school also has an indoor swimming pool, recreation area and farming facility.

Current students maintain traditions of the past by interacting with the local community, electing student leaders and excelling in art and language instruction.

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Last summer, participants from

the ceremony and introduced guests and Tribal Council, who were all present.

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of Chemawa Indian School

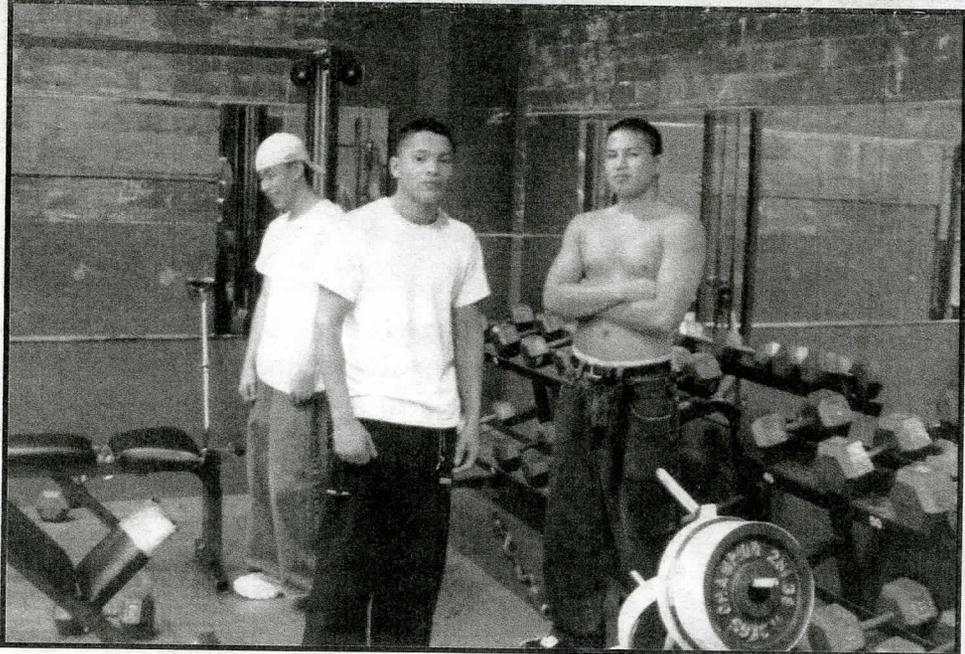
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Native Pride is prominent at Chemawa Indian School. Students participate in a variety of activities. Here, students Mike Dunn (left), Matt Whiteplume and Lionel Bell in the school's weight room.

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"We are trying to redesign the cur-

riculum to meet the students that we have," said Vice Principal Ted Mack. "Some of them are real successful and others aren't. We're trying to give them a chance to be successful.

"We're trying to get back to basic reading skills, basic math skills, and social skills," said Mack. "That's one of the areas that a lot of our kids are lacking. We are trying to concentrate on that. It is real hard to develop a curriculum that meets everybody's needs. We're trying to balance it out so as not to lose kids at either end of the spectrum. For example, in the English department we have 16 different sections. We are trying to keep student's interest up. The computer lab program has worked real well this year. We're trying to move forward."

Mack said many students need

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Yesterday & Today: The long, rich history of Chemawa Indian School

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basic skills and parameters.

"Basically, we're trying to put some structure in their lives," said Mack. "A lot of these kids haven't had structure or have rebelled against structure all their lives and haven't been successful.

"We have a lot of students that are talented in arts and crafts. Some in English and science," said Mack. "I think art is one of the strengths in our curriculum."

Art Teacher Don Bailey agrees with Mack that art is a strength of many students. Bailey said this academic year has been very positive at Chemawa.

"The students here are visual learners," said Bailey. "They sometimes have trouble with the idea of abstract art, but there is so much talent here that it keeps me from going to a public school to teach. The last two years, I've had a great crop of kids."

Bailey, who also oversees the school's gifted and talented art students, said the students take to the art classes right away. He said students are learning and growing.

"This has been the most positive year we have had here in a long time," said Bailey.

Student Body President Clarissa Antonio likes school and takes pride in her role as a student leader. Antonio, from Pueblo Acoma, also misses her traditional activities at home in New Mexico. She said it took a while to get used to her new surroundings.

"I've been here three years and this is my senior year," said Antonio. "I had to get used to it here and being away from home. The first year I got homesick. I had my cousins here to help me through that. It was a learning experience. I don't like being away from my traditional dances and activities — missing out on all that. Most of our traditional activities take place during the school year. I look forward to going back to that after I graduate from here."

Antonio said she will return home to her tribe after graduation from Chemawa. She would like to enroll at the University of New Mexico.

Antonio said the friendships she has made mean a great deal to her.

"One of the things that usually brings the students back to Chemawa is the people they meet and coming back here they know they can be reunited with the people they met over the years," said Antonio. "It is interesting getting to know the different people and the tribes they come from."

After attending public school prior to coming to Chemawa, Antonio is in a unique position to compare.

"The difference between public school and here is the culture is more recognized here," explained Antonio. "At public schools everybody has cliques and everybody sticks to those cliques. Native Americans aren't recognized as much in the public school that I went to. Here it's all Native Americans and everybody talks to everybody. Here the culture is a lot richer with the pow-wows and the pow-wow club. There is more cultural contact than there would be at a public school. You grow close with the people here."

Senior Ceylon Grey Mountain, from Fort Duchesne's Uintah and Ouray Ute Reservation in Northeastern Utah, said he also has adapted to life at Chemawa.

"Last year it was totally different. It was more like a family. This year, everyone has kind of drifted apart and gone into their own groups," said Grey Mountain, who is in his second year at Chemawa.

Grey Mountain said he wants to go to college and wishes he had an opportunity to take college prep courses not offered at Chemawa. Grey Mountain wants to study law and English. He said he will go to night school in the summer and go to a junior college if he has to.

He said the difference between public school and Chemawa is obvious.

"Here you know everybody," said Grey Mountain. "In a public school you hardly know anybody. Here it is easier to stay focused, but the curriculum could be a lot more challenging than it is."

Although Antonio and Grey Mountain are aware of the past and the changes the school has gone through, they, like most young people regardless of culture or geography, are focused on their own lives and how to get through school and begin preparing for life after high school.

"I think part of the problem here is that some students are afraid to speak up and let their voice be heard," said Antonio. "They are worried about what their peers are going to think and I don't think they should let that get in the way of letting their voice be heard."

Grey Mountain agrees with Antonio that students have an opportunity to be heard. He said whether or not students take advantage of that



Ceylon Grey Mountain (left) and Student Body President Clarissa Antonio are part of a new spirit at Chemawa Indian School.

opportunity is up to them.

"For some people, their friends are everything to them and for others it doesn't matter — it's just another joke," said Grey Mountain. "I don't think they should depend on what their friends think of what they do or whom they talk to. Because it is your life and you have the right to live your life the way you want to."

Antonio said the recent improvement of the school's athletic teams has carried over to the student body. She said students are excited about going to games and spend their own time attending games to support the teams.

"Athletics are a big deal here," said Antonio. "The students do support the team. We have a pep rally to show our support and recognize our athletic people."

Mack said the emotional carry over from athletic success has changed the way some students approach daily life at the school.

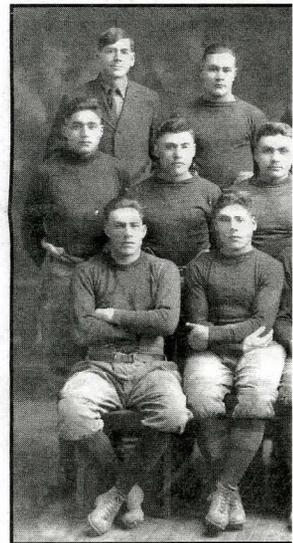
"I think a lot of kids have realized they can win, and even if they don't win the game they are winning by playing and doing their best," said Mack. "The boy's team (basketball) has won more games this year than in the last four or five years combined. Kids are attending the games on their own time. In the past when study hour was over, the kids would just go wander around. Now, they get a pass and go back to the game and support the team. I think it transfers over into the classroom as well. They see that they can be successful."

Grey Mountain said people at the school are proud of the athlete's success, but he said the majority of students are not athletes and they (non-athletes) need a means of attaining recognition as well.

"Last year we had performing arts and they went all over," he said. "This year, it's not even started."

He said individual success depends on the kind of person each student is. "If you want to be involved and you want to be successful the opportunity is here for you," added Antonio.

School Superintendent Louis King said Chemawa is on the right track with academics and they are making improvements all the time in the



overall scheme of the school. King said although the school constantly works to overcome funding issues much has changed.

"I'm pleased with where we are going," said King. "For the last five years, we have been involved in the BIA's (Bureau of Indian Affairs) school improvement efforts, which is part of the Improving America Schools Act. We've developed a mission statement for our school."

"Funding is an issue," said King. "When you look at the funding a Indian boarding school receives compared to a public school, there is disparity. We are working hard to work within the limitations that we have to bring about the best program for students. We are making forward progress in trying to bring about school reform, school improvements and to raise expectations for students."

According to King, 46 different tribal affiliations are currently represented at Chemawa.

"We have 16 states this year that are sending students to school," said King. "They are a very diverse group of folks, but they all share their cu

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Tribal Chair recounts school memories

By Brent Merrill

Grand Ronde Tribal Chair Kathryn Harrison wants people to know that there are many success stories at Chemawa Indian School. Harrison attended Chemawa from 1939 to 1942.

Harrison said much of her life was shaped while attending Chemawa. She said she learned life skills that she still uses everyday.

"I would like people to know there are positive things that come out of there and a lot of successful people have come out of there," said Harrison. "Most things you hear and see (in the media) are negatives. There were good athletes, seamstresses, and carpenters. I went to school with people like Henry Sijohn, who was an amazing singer. Lefty Wilder was another student at the time (Wilder gained fame in the 1930's for being a four sport star at Chemawa while having just one arm). Jazz musician Spade Coolie went to Chemawa as well as Frank Backbone (record setting athlete), Stanley Williams (a carpenter), Robair Thomas (a printing instructor) and Robert Mitchum (famous actor). They had what we called the Rhythm Chiefs (musicians). There were a lot of talented people out there. In my time, the school was self-sufficient. We had orchards, vegetable gardens and fruit trees and we picked and canned the fruit and vegetables. So, when winter came, the school had its own supply of food. There were cows — the boys learned how to farm."

Harrison said half her day was spent in class and the other half was spent learning a vocation.

"The difference (between the school back then and now) was we went to school half-a-day and then we went to vocational training the other half-a-day," said Harrison. "We learned to crochet, knit and darn socks. We learned just basic life skills that you could use. We sang and performed at school functions."

A typical day for Harrison started when the bell rang first thing in the morning.

"The bell rang and woke you and you got right up and went down with your towel and soap," remembered Harrison. "You got \$30 a month in script. With that you had to buy your toothpaste, soap, and wax to wax your floors. And, you always had to save your money for nickel hops (dances) and you had to pay to go to a show in the auditorium."

Harrison said students lined up according to classes when ever attending a school event. Everyone had to be on time.

"Every class put on a dance and a play. We always had a Sadie Hawkins dance when the girls asked the boys and paid their way. I bet they don't even know what one is today. We held a pageant at the end of the school year. That really gave you pride," she said.

Harrison said she remembers everyone had a job to do. Students were assigned to the bakery or the laundry or the kitchen. Students cleaned the dining room and cleared the dishes and reset the table.

She said some students worked for the teachers or administrators after school and on weekends. She worked for the superintendent doing laundry, cleaning and making the beds. She remembers taking table scraps to the superintendent's dog.

"It was helpful. We felt privileged," said Harrison. "Every other weekend we girls could go to town. But, you had to have enough girls signed up to go and they had to have saved some money too. We went shopping or to the movie. They (school staffers) protected us even though we didn't like it.



Kathryn Harrison (left), Marie Mount LaRoque and June Simmons Austin at their graduation from Chemawa in 1942.

We learned how to budget and cook meals. It was fun. You could go over to the orchard and fill your suitcase with apples or prunes and if anybody had money we would go down to the store and buy a box of Ritz crackers. There was a lot of sharing. At that age you're always hungry. If you had a friend who worked in the kitchen you could have them make you a sandwich of peanut butter and honey. They would sneak it out to you."

She remembers people getting creative with their hunger.

"We had what was known as a soup sandwich," said Harrison with a smile. "A soup sandwich is three dry slices of bread — one dipped in the soup and placed in between the others for a sandwich. Anything tasted good."

Harrison remembers the athletic teams of her day were always successful. She said people didn't want to play Chemawa because they knew they were going to get beaten.

"We had great teams and we won a lot," said Harrison. "There was a lot of pride then. It was great."

Harrison said her best memory of Chemawa came when she arrived.

"For me, coming from a foster home, my best memory was knowing that is where I was going to go," said Harrison. "They (her foster parents) never told me where I was going. When we pulled up to that driveway leading to Winona Hall — I knew I was going to be among my own people and things would be okay."

Harrison's worst memories of Chemawa were the good-byes at the end of each school year.

"We would sing 'God Be With You Till We Meet Again,'" said Harrison, obviously saddened by the memory. "We held hands. We knew it was going to be hard, but it was our tradition. We never got through it. It was always too hard. Then school ended. Some of the students were leaving on the bus that brought them. You always knew when to be ready. They would post it — Flathead bus is leaving on such and such a day. Some would go by train. The rest were left behind, and there were quite a few. The train whistle became the loneliest sound of all when you knew they were taking your friends away.

"I remember standing at the window many times listening to that (whistle) and crying," said Harrison.

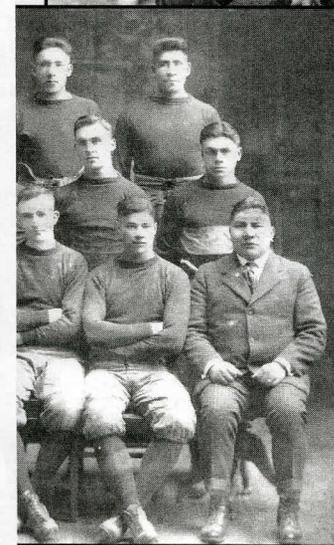
Despite the sadness of certain memories, Harrison said many good things happened to her at Chemawa. "Chemawa is where I gained my self-esteem," said Harrison. "I had none when I got there."

Harrison remembers making her own dress for graduation and the pride she felt at its completion.

"One of my best memories is of graduation. We made our own long dresses," said Harrison. The dress had ribbons that we made ourselves. It was nice to walk down there and have your name called. I didn't have anyone there from my family, but I felt part of it all."



Above: 1916 girls basketball team. Left: 1919 football team.



and tries to create alternatives for each student.

"Alcohol and drug abuse and other social ills are rampant in Indian Country and we see a lot of those kids coming here to us who are products of that," said King. "For a number of years in the past, we were really in denial over that, but in the last few years we have really come out of that and now we are saying come on lets get to work. We have a lot of work to do. So, we deal with a lot of the social problems kids have as well as educational issues, but we are just funded to be a school."

King envisions a future Chemawa that will go a step further and provide mental health counseling and recreational therapy that currently they aren't ready for.

"We're optimistic that we will be able to do some of the things that our students are saying, through their crying out, that they need," said King. "Chemawa is trying to open up its doors and be more accessible to the community. For so many years, Chemawa has been viewed as a little island out here in North Salem. We are really looking at the whole student, rather just bringing students here and giving them a traditional education; we are looking at ways to improve them academically, socially and spiritually."

"We're really hoping that much like your tribal chairman (Grand Ronde Tribal Chairman Kathryn Harrison), our students go on and become tribal chairman back in their communities," said King. "When I look at pictures of the famous chiefs of the past, I see the same faces in our kids here today. It's amazing how you can see that connection. We want these students to be lifelong learners, not just stop with high school. This is really just a beginning."

tures. There are some commonalities, but there are also some distinctions among that broad range of folks. Native Pride is a common theme that prevails here at our school year round. It (Native Pride) really is a year round focus for us here at the school.

"We're working very hard to improve our curriculum," said King. "We are trying to hone in on what our students needs are. We take kids that have really run out of opportunities back home. Boarding schools today represent an alternative to years ago when there were not a lot of options or public schools near reservations. That has really changed. There are more schools, and tribes have established their own schools. We provide safety, adequate housing and food and those are the basics before someone can go on and think about something like education. A lot of these students weren't getting that at home on their reservations."

King said attitudes about youth alcohol and drug abuse is also changing at Chemawa. King said the issue is a challenge. He said the school now embraces the problem